



Public Input - A Critical Component of the Vision 21 Process

In late Spring, 2001, the Transportation Vision 21 Task Force adopted a series of Preliminary Recommendations designed to provide a strong framework to guide transportation decision-making and ensure adequate funding for the system over the next twenty years. The Preliminary Recommendations focused on four areas:

- Improve Transportation Planning and Programming Processes
- Enhance Transportation System Accountability and Responsiveness
- Development of a 20-year Statewide Transportation System "Budget"
- Identify and Establish Transportation System Funding Priorities

Following the approval of these recommendations, the Task Force initiated a series of public input strategies to solicit public comment on the Preliminary Recommendations and state transportation issues in general. These strategies included ten statewide *Open Houses*, two modified *Focus Groups* in Tucson and Phoenix, and a statewide *Public Opinion Telephone Survey*.

This newsletter provides a brief summary of information learned from the public input processes and describes those underway. Public input received is being utilized to refine the recommendations and develop new recommendations, as needed, in preparation for a final Task Force report to Governor Hull in December, 2001. The final report will identify Arizona's multi-modal needs over the next twenty years, along with projected revenue sources and identify a variety of strategies to improve transportation planning in the state as well as improve transportation system accountability and responsiveness.

Open Houses

Transportation Open Houses were conducted at ten locations throughout Arizona in July, 2001. The primary objectives of the Open Houses were to: (1) disseminate information regarding the work of the Task Force and the Preliminary Recommendations; and (2) provide an opportunity

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for citizens to comment on the Preliminary Recommendations and express their opinions regarding transportation issues.

The number of participants at each Open House ranged from 22 in Yuma to 89 in Tucson. The average number of participants was 41 and the total number of participants at the Open Houses was 408.

The meetings were held in an Open House format with six informational stations. Informational boards at each station illustrated Task Force work to date and key Preliminary Recommendations. Task Force members, staff and consultants were on hand to provide information, respond to questions, and listen to comments from those attending. Attendees were strongly encouraged to

complete a survey form designed to elicit feed-back regarding the Preliminary Recommendations. A supplemental open-ended comment form allowed participants to express any general transportation concerns. The public meeting materials, as well as the survey, were also made available on the Vision 21 website.

A Summary of Comments from the Open Houses – What We Learned

A total of 571 survey forms were submitted. 286 surveys were returned at the Open Houses. Another 285 surveys were received subsequent to the Open Houses by fax, email or mail.

A review of survey response forms indicated that respondents were predominately male, with over two-thirds of all responses. Notably, of the



Ten Open Houses were held throughout the state in July.

total 571 surveys submitted, 196 respondents indicated that they had lived in Arizona for over thirty years. Nearly 75% of all respondents indicated that they had lived in Arizona for longer than 10 years.

Some respondents also chose to provide comments by mail and fax. Of the surveys and comment forms submitted following the public meetings, a large number of these came from representatives of the home-builders' industry in the Phoenix area.

The survey asked for responses to four substantive questions. The questions addressed the issues of:

- *Transportation System Priorities,*
- *Transportation System Tax Sources,*
- *Transportation System Tax Rates, and*
- *Transportation Routes.*

While not a statistically valid sample of the entire state, the surveys and comment forms did provide valuable insights to the Task Force and strong feedback on their Preliminary Recommendations.

On the issue of *Transportation System Priorities*, the survey asked respondents to rank a series of items using a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being very important and 10 being not important at all. The five top *Transportation System Priorities* in rank order were:

1. Synchronized traffic lights on all major urban streets region-wide.
2. Increase capacity of key urban streets – more lanes, fewer and timed lights, and bus pullouts.

3. Better maintenance of streets.
4. Better maintenance of freeways and highways.
5. More lanes on congested freeways in large urban areas (Phoenix and Tucson).

On the issue of *Transportation System Tax Sources*, the survey asked respondents to rank the list of possible sources, also using a scale from 1 to 10. The two Tax Sources cited the most frequently by respondents were:


1. Increase in statewide gasoline tax dedicated to transportation purposes.
2. New fee for single occupant vehicles to use High Occupancy Vehicle lanes.

The most acceptable of the possible *Transportation System Tax Sources* was a statewide gasoline tax that ranked above the rest. Similarly, the second most acceptable tax source ranked well ahead of the remaining options.

The question dealing with *Transportation Tax Rates* asked respondents to rank the possible transportation system tax increases using a scale from 1 to 10. The responses were:

1. 4 cent gasoline tax increase dedicated to transportation purposes.
2. ¼% sales tax increase dedicated to transportation purposes.
3. 8 cent gasoline tax increase dedicated to transportation purposes.
4. ½% sales tax increase dedicated to transportation purposes.
5. ½% residential/commercial development fee dedicated to transportation purposes.



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6. 1% residential/commercial development fee dedicated to transportation purposes.
 7. ¾% sales tax increase dedicated to transportation purposes.
 8. 12 cent gasoline tax increase dedicated to transportation purposes.

The responses to this question significantly favored a 4-cent gasoline and a ¼% sales tax increase over the other options. The acceptability levels of an 8-cent gasoline tax increase, a ½% sales tax increase and a ½% development fee were comparable. The acceptability levels of a 1% development fee, ¾% sales tax increase and a 12-cent gasoline tax increase were also very comparable. The support for the remaining options dropped off significantly.

The fourth survey question addressed the issue of *Transportation Routes*. Twenty-five routes listed on the survey form were divided into four regions of the state. The survey asked respondents to identify their five most important transportation routes, with 1 being the most important, 2 being the second most important, etc. Responses to this question, proved inconsistent.

The two top ranked routes I-17 between Phoenix and Flagstaff and I-10 between Phoenix and Tucson were clearly ahead of the other routes in importance. These rankings reflect strong responses by attendees at the Flagstaff, Peoria and Prescott Open Houses, and similarly, the Tucson, Sierra Vista, Peoria and Chandler attendees heavily influenced the I-10 response.

Additional Comments: Participants also submitted additional comments on the full range of Task Force Preliminary Recommendations. Of note were objections to changes in the State Board structure and proposed regional transportation districts, as well as concerns about the lack of multi-modal emphasis. Improved transit and bike/pedestrian services was raised by several participants, in both urban and rural areas. A number of comments in favor of light rail were also submitted.

Focus Groups

In addition to the ten Transportation Open Houses, the Task Force commissioned the conduct of two focus groups to gauge public reaction to the Task Force's Preliminary Recommendations.

The two focus groups, one in Tucson and one in Phoenix, were held in June 2001. Eighty people participated in the two focus group discussions: 39 in Tucson; 41 in Phoenix. Participants were randomly selected and represented a cross section of residents within the two metropolitan areas. Participants were selected based on the following parameters:

- Participants were selected from the high propensity voter list.
- The group represented the general demographic makeup of their respective communities relative to age, gender, race and income.
- Members also reflected the actual percentage of transportation users in each market relative to

automobile commuters, bus riders, and single-occupant vehicles as determined by each region's planning authority.

It should be noted however, the overall number of participants was not large enough to provide a statistically reliable sample for either metropolitan area or for the State as a whole.

I. Transportation Improvement Project Priorities

Participants in the focus group meetings were asked to rank their transportation priorities from among 12 alternative project types. The top three transportation improvements most important to developing an efficient and effective transportation system were:

1. Synchronize traffic lights on all major streets region-wide.
2. Increase capacity on key streets – more lanes, fewer and timed lights, and bus pullouts.
3. More lanes on congested freeways.

II. Recommendations to Improve Process and Accountability

First, participants were asked their opinions concerning the overall operation of the transportation system.

1. Do you think statewide transportation priorities are being decided correctly? (Ranked on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest.)

- Tucson average – 1.93
 - Phoenix average – 4.61
2. Do you think transportation priorities affecting your region are being decided correctly?
 - Tucson average – 1.87
 - Phoenix average – 4.46

Respondents were dissatisfied with the current process of making transportation decisions. In Tucson, the frustrations were primarily from ongoing local improvements and a lack of freeway construction compared to Phoenix. Phoenix participants were more satisfied than Tucson residents due to the ongoing completion of the regional freeway program.

Secondly, participants were asked their opinions on specific recommendations dealing with the way transportation improvements are budgeted, planned and constructed. Possible improvements included:

- Change “who” prioritizes projects
- Change “how” projects are prioritized by expected performance
- Require more “consistent” planning at state, regional and local level.
- Establish “long-term” plan and budget.
- Integrate transportation planning and “land use” planning.
- Improve “connections” of transportation modes between roads, transit, airports, bike paths, etc.

Analyzing the key words shown in quotations, the participants felt that all of the recommendations were likely to improve the way transportation decisions are made. Improving connections between transportation modes and requiring more consistent planning rated slightly higher.



III. Key Transportation Routes

Participants in the focus group meetings were asked to rank the key transportation corridors and routes within the State from a list of state-wide routes. Interstate 10, by far, was ranked as the most important route.

Although both Phoenix and Tucson participants ranked Interstate 10 as the number one key route, Tucson ratings for I-10 were much higher. Other top priority routes for Tucson were Interstate 8, Interstate 19, and Interstate 17 respectively. Interstate 17 was the second most important route for Phoenix residents with US Route 93 from Phoenix to Kingman (Las Vegas) coming in third.

IV. Preferred Funding Mechanisms

Participants were then asked how they would prefer to fund needed transportation improvements.

Development and High Occupancy Vehicle lane fees were the preferred funding mechanisms. Discussion during the sessions indicated that participants were much more willing to pay user fees for transportation improvements instead of general purpose taxes. Tucson residents were more willing to pay development fees than the combined group and Phoenix residents preferred High Occupancy Vehicle lane fees to development fees.

V. Funding Levels Most Likely to Approve

Finally, participants were then asked which tax or fee levels they were willing to support to fund needed transportation improvements.

Respondents were most likely to vote for a one-quarter percent sales tax to fund transportation improvements. Tucson residents preferred a two-percent development fee and Phoenix residents slightly preferred the one-half percent development fee to the one-quarter percent sales tax.

Public Opinion Telephone Survey

The Task Force has contracted with a public opinion survey firm to conduct a statewide random sample telephone opinion survey. This transportation survey will be completed in November. The survey will be statistically valid with a margin error of 5% and will solicit public opinion from all regions of the state regarding key issues being addressed by the Task Force, including those dealing with transportation priorities, potential sources of transportation funding, as well as the issues of transportation planning and accountability. Similar to the focus groups, the survey will concentrate on those residents most likely to vote in upcoming elections. In addition, the survey will provide balanced representation from each region in the state.

What Happens Next?

The results of the survey and comment forms submitted during the public meeting process, as well as the responses from participants of the focus groups are currently being analyzed by the Task Force, its consultants and staff. This input, along with the results of the statewide public opinion poll, will be used to revise the Preliminary Recommendations developed by the Task Force.

The Task Force is in the process of developing draft final recommendations. These recommendations will be presented at the November 13, 2001 meeting, for review and discussion. The Task Force is scheduled to finalize the recom-

mendations and the report to the Governor at its meeting on December 13, 2001 in keeping with the terms of the Executive Order guiding activities of the Vision 21 Task Force.

It is anticipated that the final report to the Governor will include a detailed assessment of statewide transportation needs and projected revenues over the next twenty years, as well as recommendations for ensuring these needs are adequately addressed. It is also anticipated that the final report will include measures to improve transportation planning and accountability, as well as transportation system governance structures.



Open House attendees discussed the Task Force Preliminary Recommendations.